



219 North Main Street | Suite 402 | Barre, VT 05641
(p) 802-479-1360 | (f) 802-479-1822 | education.vermont.gov

MEMORANDUM

TO: School Principals, Superintendents and Business Managers

FROM: Laurie M Colgan, Director, Child Nutrition Programs

DATE: April 30, 2014

RE: Community Eligibility Provision & School Food Service Programs

Starting July 1, 2014, a school or group of schools with 40% or more of their students directly certified for free meals have the opportunity to participate in the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). This new provision allows schools to implement a universal free meals program where meals are served at no charge to all students for a period of 4 years and the school no longer has to collect free and reduced-price meal applications.

The Community Eligibility Provision is a new opportunity that allows the food service program to offer breakfast and lunch at no charge to all students for a four-year period. Schools must continue to plan and serve meals that meet the meal pattern requirements and count the total number of breakfasts and lunches served each day. The school earns free and paid reimbursement for the meals served based on a claiming percentage determined by enrolled numbers of 'Identified Students.' The Claiming Percentage is determined by the number of students that are directly certified, called 'Identified Students' (through Direct Certification for 3SquaresVT or Reach-Up, Migrant, Homeless, and Runaway youth, Head Start children, and some foster children) multiplied times the USDA claiming factor of 1.6%. This factor takes in to account the additional income-eligible students that would typically be eligible based on meal applications. For example, if 50% of the students enrolled are directly certified as free eligible, the school will be reimbursed for 80% of its meals served at the free rate ($1.6 \times 50\% = 80\%$ free meal claiming percentage), with the remaining 20% of the meals reimbursed at the paid rate. Since meals are served at no charge, the school(s) will need to contain meal costs and have additional non-Federal revenues available should the reimbursement earned be insufficient to cover all of the meal expenses.

The 1.6% factor stays in effect for the 4-year period. Schools do have the opportunity to increase their free claiming percentage each year by reviewing their Direct Certification numbers, number of 'Identified Students' enrolled each year by April 1; the claiming percentage will not decrease over the 4-year period. Schools that determine the Community Eligibility Provision is not feasible at the end of the year may return to the regular meal claiming option.

Our office has been reviewing numbers of directly certified students in schools based on the data that we have available to us and has prepared a proxy list of eligible schools whose direct

certification rates were reported to be 40% and higher, as well as the schools with rates between 30% and 40% directly certified. This list is attached so that you may determine if your school might be eligible. This proxy list is as a guide and does not include all of the students in your schools who may be considered directly certified. **We must update our information and have attached a form that must be completed and returned.** Your school may have additional students who are migrant students, homeless students, runaway youth, Head Start students, or foster children that are not counted in this number. Your schools may also ask the DCF office if households that submitted applications reporting a food stamp case number are now directly certified for benefits. This contact information and "Benefit Verification Form" is found on page 29 the VT Appendix posted on our website. **All schools are required to provide this data; please submit to our office the data sheet attached so that we may update this information which must be provided to USDA. This form is due May 8th.**

Schools that have used meal application information in the past to determine eligibility for other programs such as Title 1, E-rate, the Child & Adult Care Food Program, and the Summer Food Service Program may use the free claiming percentage determined through CEP or refer to the Title 1 guidance manual posted on our website.

In summary, to be eligible, schools must meet the minimum level of identified students (40%), agree to serve free lunches and breakfasts to all students, not collect free and reduce price meal applications from households, and agree to cover any costs of providing the free meals above the reimbursement earned with non-federal funds.

Next steps if you are considering this option:

1. Determine if your school is eligible, or your grouping of schools is eligible. A school or group of schools must have at least 40% of their enrolled students directly certified for free meal benefits.
2. Evaluate the potential revenue generated from reimbursement and compare that to your projected annual food service program costs. A Community Eligibility Estimator can be found on the Child Nutrition website: <http://education.vermont.gov/nutrition/school-nutrition/policy>.
3. Submit a letter indicating your intention to participate to the State Agency indicating the school(s) in the Supervisory Union that would like to implement CEP in school year 2014-2015 and indicate the actual number(s) of 'Identified Students' for the school or group of schools that you are considering or indicate this information on the attached form. If you have questions about CEP or the other alternative, Provision 2, please contact me.

More information is available on the Child Nutrition Programs website. If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact me at laurie.colgan@state.vt.us or (802) 479-1187.

Enc. CEP Data Sheet
CEP Q & As
CEP Estimator